

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

May 2010

Sunday, May 9, 1:30-4:00 p.m. Richard Kowaleski on “What We Could Do Better”

Special Points of Interest

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On May 9, AOF is pleased to present Richard Andrew Kowaleski, critical thinker, professional stage magician, Rotarian speaker, bon vivant and hot ballroom dancer.

As we know, even most non- and anti-religious people have little heartfelt affiliation to organized freethought. Why? Does our "movement" cripple itself? Do freethinkers marginalize and ghettoize themselves, and how can they fix this?

With typical grace, humor and intellectual scalpel, Richard will dissect our movement and examine what freethinkers can do to tear down fences without prostituting their beliefs. Richard has spoken to AOF before, as well as performing and serving as Master of Ceremonies at Sacramento Freethought Day. He always has insightful, albeit controversial, presentations. Be prepared to think and be challenged.



June 13, 2010, 1:30-4:30 p.m. Coming In June: Raves & Rants: Books or Other Media

For our June meeting, AOF will try something new: An open-mike, round-robin membership media review. Please bring at least one example of a most-admired or *most-deplored* book, novel, poem, article, movie, piece of music, piece of art, television program or other media. Naturally we hope it will relate to freethought somehow, be of interest to freethinkers, or at least be something cerebral; but imagination is your limit. Be playful, creative. Just be ready to talk about it, review it or deconstruct it,



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AOF Member Don Knutson A Blood Source Hero!

Kudos and congratulations to AOF member Don Knutson, who joined the Sacramento Blood Source "10 Gallon Club" (80-pint donor level) this April. Don has consistently supported the AOF Blood Source Donor Club. For his gift of life, the Blood Source will recognize him in an honor ceremony later this year.



In fact three other AOF members are close to his donor level or have actually surpassed him. As of March 16, Ken Nahigian has donated 70 pints, another member has donated 40 pints, and most impressive, as of April 7, member C-- L-- has made 247 donations of precious platelets.

If you would also like to save lives with a donation of blood, plasma or platelets, call the Blood Source today (toll free, 866-822-5663) to schedule a visit. It is fast, it is fun, it is painless as a pinprick, it makes a true difference, and what could possibly be more *humanist* than a blood donation? Also, they ply you the best granola bars and orange juice ever! Be sure to provide the AOF Donor Club ID# when you donate: 4857.

(Continued from page 1)

give good reason why you admired or deplored it, how it enhanced your life or utterly wasted your time. Should the rest of us read/see it immediately, or avoid it like the pox, and why? You may review more than one item, of course, but for fairness just one at a time. After the first review round, everyone with a second media-item will get a chance at the lectern, and so on. Thus, if you have several, plan to do the most interesting one first. AOF "open mike" sessions have always been a success, so expect a fun and educational afternoon. You might even want to take notes.

Furthermore we hope to make this more of a party- and social-event, so edible/potable goodies for the snack table will be welcome – finger foods only, nothing heavy (canapés yes, roast turkey no) (unless your book is a turkey). As usual, AOF will provide a beverage.

AOF Board (2010)

President: Beverly Church

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Jillian Stanley

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large: David Flanders, Paul Geisert, Brian Jones, Ken Nahigian, Mario Sandri

AOF Standing Committees

All AOF members are urged to volunteer in the organization. There are openings in every committee listed here. Please contact the chair or coordinator of any area of interest to you to learn details of getting involved. We would love to have your participation! Phone AOF 916-447-3589 or e-mail aofboard@aofonline.org for direct contact to relevant personnel.

Programs and Events Committee

Program Planning (Team Coordinator, Brian Jones)
Meeting Matters / Logistics (Team Coordinator, *Open*)
Social Activities (Team Coordinator, *Open*)

Membership Committee

Members Tracking (Team Coordinator, Ken Nahigian)
"Freethought Friends" (Team Coordinator, Jillian Stanley)
Outreach / Recruiting (Team Coordinator, Steve Campbell)

Communications Committee

Beverly Church, Chair
AOF News Team (newsletter editor, events editor, public editor, postmaster, webmaster)

Education, Activism and Service Committee

Service Projects Coordinator: Don Knutson
Education/Action Coordinator: Mynga Futrell

Building / Reason House Committee

Beverly Church, Chair
Paul Geisert, Mynga Futrell, Mario Sandri

Freethought Day 2010: Date to be announced

Beverly Church, Chair. (Save the date! – It's a celebration of reason and church/state separation)

Darwin Day 2011: Date to be announced

Mynga Futrell and Bronda Silva, Co-Chairs
(Save the date! – It's a celebration of science and humanity)

AOF Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons

Mynga Futrell, Atheists Alliance International (AAI), <http://atheistalliance.org/>
Kevin Schultz, American Atheists (AA), <http://atheists.org/>
Beverly Church, American Humanist Association (AHA), <http://americanhumanist.org/>
Hank Kocol, Council for Secular Humanism (CSH), <http://secularhumanism.org/>

AOF News Team

Newsletter Editor: Kevin Schultz
Postmaster: Jerry Sloan
Webpeoples: Pat Kelley, Robert Poeschel, Kevin Schultz
(Openings for Events Editor and Public Editor)

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No Sex, Explosions—But Lots of Delicious Pasta! Flying Spaghetti Monster Party Recap By David Flanders

In April, AOFers and visitors partook in a spaghetti dinner in honor of a deity--the Flying Spaghetti Monster. One may soon have recognized however that no one there showed respect nor reverence towards the Flying Spaghetti Monster. Prizes were awarded to some of the participants there, but none of them seemed inclined to offer thanksgiving towards the Flying Spaghetti Monster (F.S.M.), nor feel remorse if the He (or She) deity was retired to the graveyard of bad ideas, as were other previous failed religions. The food was great and refueled the bodies of those present.

There's an interesting biological yardstick, called the RMR, which stands for resting metabolic rate. Your RMR is the amount of energy your body needs just to stay alive. At rest the brain consumes 20% of that energy. The brain uses a variety of strategies and tricks to minimize the energy it requires. Following a well-worn pattern such as worshiping the F.S.M. repeatedly is one way one could conserve brain energy--possibly an effective brain soother. But a person at the dinner thought engaging in that activity would be unproductive and toxic to society, and considered the F.S.M. to be a mere consumer fetish—the spa-

ghetti is consumed, and the fetish (an object believed among primitive people to have magical power to protect and aid its owner) to be no more valid than someone with a shoe fetish or an underwear fetish.

Years ago a man with a religion fetish and a shoe fetish got on board a plane and decided in his mind that his shoes (not just any shoes), laced with explosives would help him achieve union with 72 virgins in the afterlife. His experiment failed. Later, another man with a religion fetish and an apparent underwear fetish—he was wearing underwear laced with explosives, came on board an airplane and thought he too would be granted sex with 72 virgins in the afterlife. He also failed in his endeavor. But both succeeded in increasing fear at airports and in increasing delay times for those getting on board planes.

Fortunately, no exploding spaghetti occurred at the Flying Spaghetti Monster Dinner.

Note: The Flying Spaghetti Monster Party netted approximately \$100 towards Reason House (see page five).



Catch Sacramento Comedian Keith Lowell Jensen Online

Join him every week as the Reverend Keith Lowell Jensen delivers a sermon for the enlightened. Tithe unnecessary but please, wear pants.

<http://rockass.net/>

Atheists and Other Freethinkers



AOF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization. It is one of 50 member societies of the **Atheist Alliance International** ("a positive voice for atheism"). AOF also maintains affiliations with the

Council for Secular Humanism, American Atheists, and the American Humanist Association.

AOF's Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the association, Atheists and Other Freethinkers, is to promote the civic understanding of atheism and the acceptance of atheists in our community. Through educational programs, projects, and publications, AOF will extend secular perspectives, including the separation of religion and government and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.

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Print subscription \$12 per year, e-mail subscription free to all on request.

Reprinting of original material in this newsletter is granted to atheist, freethought, rationalist, skeptical, and secular humanist groups as long as acknowledgment is given. Exchange of newsletters with aforementioned organizations is solicited.

Historical Figures Series

The Shaver Mystery

By Ken Nahigian

It was the 1940s, the Golden Age of science fiction, the era of the Pulp. What were *Pulps*? Printed on rough wood-pulp paper with untrimmed edges, bearing names like *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, *Weird Tales* and *Astounding*, these were heir apparent to the Penny Dreadfuls, the Dime Novels and short fiction journals of the previous century. Bright cover art (we'll say it now: "lurid," "garish") drew a stream of breathless fans, mostly male teens and pre-teens aching through the first crystal pangs of puberty. *Amazing Stories* was a Pulp, possibly the first. Founded in 1926 by Hugo Gernsback, a wretchedly bad writer who compensated with galvanic energy and a sharp business sense, it created a literary field. But this is not about Gernsback, nor his magazine, really. It is about two young fans.

The first was Raymond A. Palmer, b. 1910, a crippled teen who had once suffered a broken back. He read insatiably. He stood four feet tall. At age 16 he found a copy of *Amazing Stories*, and that day sent his first story to Gernsback. The story sold for \$40. Raymond was hooked for life.

Sometimes the first is easiest, though. Out of his next 100 stories, 99 brought only rejections. The frustrated teen vowed someday to run his own professional science fiction magazine. He joined a club, immersed himself in fandom, put out his own fanzine (*The Comet*) and wrote countless fan letters. In 1938 a new publisher acquired *Amazing* and sacked the editor. The new owner decided to hire the enthusiastic young letter writer. Ray Palmer, age 28, landed his first editorial job.

With his propensity for fast-paced adventure and maidens in peril, Palmer was a quick success. He published Isaac Asimov's first story, "Marooned off Vesta," and some early work by Edgar Rice Burroughs. By 1943 *Amazing's* circulation had grown enough that Palmer held pretty much full reign on the magazine, answering only to the publisher. Enter: Richard Sharpe Shaver.

Young Shaver was also a cripple, but more in the emotional sense, a spiritually itinerant man on society's fringe, floating from niche to niche. Born in 1907, his life was a tale of feuds and petty antagonisms, school trouble, pranks gone awry, misunderstandings and job changes. He flirted with Communism and had a long stay in the Michigan State asylum—for stress and heat stroke, he said. Shaver fell into science fiction fandom almost by accident. In 1936 he read an article about "hidden meanings" of letters of the alphabet. Inspired, he took the theory a step further, and "discovered" a secret language, *Mantong*, the "oldest language in the world," which unlocked veiled messages in any text. In 1943 Shaver wrote to *Amazing Stories*, pleading for help with his research. An assistant editor threw the letter in the trash. Palmer retrieved it, smoothed out the wrinkles, and read. It lit his mind like lightning.

The letter, together with Shaver's article on the "Mantong Alphabet," appeared in *Amazing's* next issue. Readers cried for more. A novella/article soon followed under the Shaver byline, actually half ghost-written by Palmer. It told the story of an ancient race, the Titan-Altans, who came from a far planet to colonize the earth. They founded Atlantis, honeycombed the earth with vast cave-cities, and created "robot races" to serve them, one of which was Man. Eventually the Titans realized that solar radiation was killing them; they fled, leaving their creations behind. Some "robot races" remained in the catacombs and became *Deros*, short for *decremental robots*. These malicious beings cause all suffering today, from earthquakes to lost car keys.

The issue was a sellout. Palmer began to run Shaver stories in every issue. Circulation grew to 185,000, and letters poured in. Some readers reported personal contact with the *Deros* or actual visits to the secret catacombs. They often had a terrified tone. Not all fans were happy with this new direction for *Amazing*, however. After letters of complaint and an angry petition, the publisher told Palmer to cease the Shaver obsession. No more Shaver stories appeared after June 1947.

Disgusted, Palmer resigned. By then he was convinced of the truth of the new theory. He went on to other publications, including books on fringe science. Shaver moved on also. He found new venues for his stories, inspired the Shaver Mystery Clubs, and acquired a fair following. But his fame diminished rapidly over the 1960's. By 1970 he lived in obscurity. Today, outside of science fiction historians, UFO aficionados and some researchers, few remember the Shaver Mystery.

Richard Shaver died in 1975, Raymond Palmer in 1977. To the end they insisted that the "Mystery" had a core of truth. Shaver's *Deros* still pop up on rock music posters and in occasional stories and horror movies, but his lasting legacy is his somewhat dark-surreal art, which has toured galleries and exhibitions, and has been compared to the work of Stanislaw Szukalski.

Palmer also left a legacy. If the name rang a bell, it may be because he founded *Fate* magazine, the best-selling occult journal of all time, still popular, and invented the term "flying saucers." Or it may be because his friend, fellow writer Gardner Fox, in 1961 created a comic book character in his honor. Of course this was the Atom, the diminutive DC Comics superhero who can shrink to subatomic size. Devoted readers will recall the Atom's secret identity: physicist and university professor Ray Palmer.

Sometimes the oddest worlds collide.

Building A Better Future for Sacramento Takes All of Us!

Reason House: A Little History (Part I)

By Mynga Futrell

There's been some discussion of late about the possibility of a "Reason House" that could serve freethinkers of all stripes in the greater Sacramento area. As was reported in the April issue of *AOF News & Views*, AOF has made a start on turning that possibility into a reality by marshaling some funds toward that purpose.

AOF had recently received a \$2,000 donation specifically marked "building fund," and the AOF board subsequently voted unanimously to earmark most of the savings funds it was then shepherding (thanks to a generous bequest in years past) to be specifically applied toward purchase of a building.

The idea is nine or ten years old. (I forget which, but Reason House had its origins when lots of folks were talking about the turn of the millennium, and it could have been the real one, or perhaps the false one the year before, but it was winter.)

And, since I was present at the beginning, I'll offer a bit of the history of how the Reason House idea came (and then went away) and now has come back to life.

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The scene was a regular meeting of the local chapter of the American Humanist Association, HAGSA, and Paul Geisert and I were giving a joint presentation about "our vision" for the 21st century. Around 30 people were attending at that winter HAGSA meeting. In advance, we had prepared both a strategy and a prop in hopes of arousing audience interest throughout. We were going to issue a challenge based on two different "recollections" from the year 2075.

Beginning our talk, we persuaded everyone to pretend the year was actually 75 years in the future, not 2001.

The first reminiscence was that there actually was little to show for our having been present at that meeting "way back in 2001." (We'd all be gone, and perhaps HAGSA would be gone as well. Pretty depressing, and it took just a minute or two.)

The other reminiscence, the upbeat one, was a 75th anniversary celebration. It was very festive, because we



were commemorating "Reason House," a building that was owned jointly by two organizations, HAGSA and AOF. This building (we said from our future perch in 2075), had been the home of so much freethought and humanistic activity across the years that we had lots to celebrate.

Two different visions.

The talk itself centered around a huge dictionary-sized "memory book" that we held up before the audience. The binder contained, we told the attendees, the fantastic record of the Reason House. We proceeded to point out items from the (pseudo) scrapbook and describe many of the activities that had taken place. When doing so, we would open to a (prepared) page from that "scrapbook." These were just examples, we said, selected from the compilation. The book itself was chock full (we said) of pictures and records compiled across seventy-five years.

By making significant use of our "prop" during the talk, we ended with an enthusiastic audience, one that was ready to act on the upbeat vision.

Surprisingly, soon afterward, they did. (Part 2, in June, will describe what happened next.)

AOF Subscription / Membership Form

Mail to: AOF, PO Box 15182, Sacramento CA 95851-0182 (Attn: Membership)

Name(s) _____ Phone: _____

Street _____ Apt. # _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP + 4 _____

E-mail address (please print!) _____

Membership Level (please circle one):

Patron (\$50) Family (\$30) Individual (\$20) Low-income (\$10)

Note: Membership does not include a newsletter subscription

Newsletter subscription:

Send my printed newsletter by postal mail (\$12 extra)

Send my newsletter by email (*Free!*) – my email address is above

Additional Donation: \$ _____

Total enclosed: \$ _____

AOF is a 501(c)(3) Educational Association – Dues & Donations are tax-deductible as

permitted by law. Non-members may receive the AOF Newsletter (same rate - \$12 printed, free via email).

Please check here if you do NOT want your name on lists occasionally provided to groups similar to AOF.

Please check here if you DO want to be an AOF Activist (e-mail address required).

Happy Mother's Day From AOF!



An Essay

To Be [AN ATHEIST], or Not to Be – That is the Question

By Paul Geisert



Recently I read this bit in the New York Times (April 19, front page):

When President Obama took the stage in Cairo last June, promising a new relationship with the Islamic world, Muslims in American wondered only half-jokingly whether the overture included them.

Nearly a year later, Mr. Obama has yet to set foot in an American mosque. But his administration has reached out to this politically isolated constituency in a sustained and widening effort that has left even skeptics surprised.

Today I had an email from a new constituent in The Brights' Network who stated, "we ought to have an atheist on the list for the new Supreme Court vacancy."

Of course, the odds having an atheist on that Supreme Court list is exactly zero.

And, I'd say that the odds of an atheist ever being on the Supreme Court are the same number. What is it that limits those odds?

I would like to suggest that atheism simply will never be accepted by the general public in the U.S. because it is, plain and simply, a "without something" (a-theism means "without a belief in gods"). It says nothing of what we are for.

What Supreme Court candidate with the most superb of legal qualifications would actually state in any seriousness, "Oh, I don't believe in much of anything, but I sure would like to be on the Supreme Court!!"

And yet, when one doesn't claim a self-identify by what one stands for, then people assign by default that "believe in nothing" attribute.

Back in 1993, when I helped to start AOF, there was a battle of concepts regarding naming of the group. Some wanted the A word, others didn't. Some wanted to add the "freethinkers" part of our name; others didn't. At that time, I favored the broader diversity.

Back then, I was considering myself an atheist and also a freethinker. Now I no longer self-identify by what I am not.

Newsletter Submissions

Submit your newsletter items to the N&V submissions editor at this e-mail address:

newsletter@aofonline.org

or mail item to the AOF mailbox: PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182.

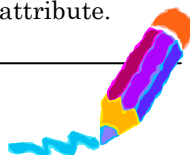
Preference is given to material in a PC-compatible word processing format such as *Word*, *Wordpad*, or *Note-pad*. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

AOF also welcomes succinct and substantive letters to the editor. Note: All letters are prioritized by AOF's publishing criteria deriving from the organization's Statement of Purpose.

Newsletter Freebie Policy

This newsletter is free by e-mail to everyone. Just send your e-mail address. If you prefer printed copy by postal mail, AOF will send one free issue on your request; after that, please subscribe at \$12 per year. For details, see the signup form on page six.

Want to send a letter to the Editor?
E-mail newsletter@aofonline.org!





P.O. Box 15182
Sacramento, CA 95851-0182

We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

May/June Calendar of Events

AOF Dinner Social; location Taste of Thai, 1628
Broadway (<http://tasteofthaisac.net>). Thursday, May 6, 6:30 p.m.
Contact: 419-2105 or shastaseer@sbcglobal.net

AOF May General Meeting Sunday, May 9, 1:30-4:00 p.m.

AOF Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup Saturday, May 22, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

AOF June General Meeting Sunday, June 13, 1:30-4:00 p.m.

AOF meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the second Sunday of the month, from 1:30 - 4 PM at the Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10. Note: The months of February and October are exceptions, since AOF co-produces two public education events: (1) an outdoor fair in October - "Sacramento's Freethought Day" (Oct 2010), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (Feb 2011). Watch the newsletter for details.

Directions to AOF's General Meetings

The Sierra 2 Center is located at 2791 24th Street in Sacramento, just south of Broadway and the Department of Motor Vehicles. Visitors are welcome. Parking is available on the street or in the rear, off 4th Avenue. AOF Board meetings are held at alternating sites, so please inquire about the location. For AOF's 24-hour recorder, call 447-3589. Leave your name and a number (repeat for clarity) and someone will phone back to answer your questions about AOF.

